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ABSTRACT

A survey was done to evaluate the impact of local school councils on Chicago (Illinois) Public School reform efforts and to share those findings with the local schools. Nearly 700 council members responded to the survey. Major findings indicate the following: (1) councils have organized themselves, evaluated their principals, and participated in the school improvement and expenditure planning process; (2) councils have directed principals in several management activities and make recommendations for change and improvement in their schools; (3) members have contributed significant time to school improvement and participated in regular council meetings, committee meetings, training sessions, and preparatory meetings; (4) members have also participated in sessions beyond those mandated by the legislation, although some have yet to attend sessions on educational theory, personnel selection, and legislation; (5) on a five-point scale, members rated themselves at 4.0, district offices at 3.4, and the Central Service Center at 2.8; (6) in organizing the councils, members established bylaws, used rules of order, created a process to replace council vacancies, and sought information and assistance from a wide variety of providers; (7) members noted improvement in the areas of student performance, instructional programs, school climate, facilities, and staffing; although (8) teachers did not perceive improvements in these areas. Statistical data are provided in 23 tables. Six references are included. (JB)

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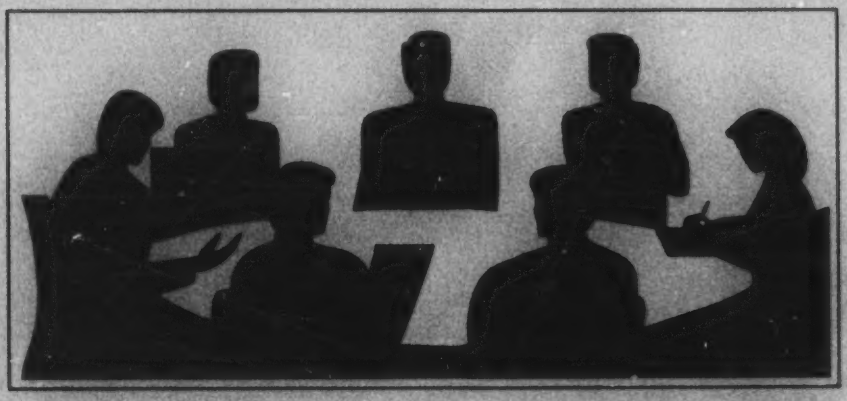
# REPORT

## RESEARCH, EVALUATION & PLANNING

# GETTING STARTED:



## A SURVEY OF LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCILS

1991

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**CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**Ted D. Kimbrough**
**General Superintendent of Schools**

UD 028 452

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# 1991 SURVEY OF LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCIL MEMBERS: A REPORT ON THE FINDINGS

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**CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

September 1991

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on a survey of Local School Council (LSC) members conducted by the Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning in the spring of 1991. The survey's main purpose was to view the impact of the councils on school reform and to share the findings with the local schools.

Close to 700 council members responded to the survey. Major findings indicated that the LSCs have organized themselves, evaluated their principals, and participated in the school improvement and expenditure planning process. In addition, councils have directed principals in a number of management activities and made recommendations for change and improvement in their schools.

The survey showed that council members have contributed a significant amount of time to school improvement. In addition to participating in regular council meetings, the members spent hours participating in committee meetings, training sessions, and preparatory meetings.

In the area of training, many council members participated in sessions beyond those mandated by the legislature; however, many council members have yet to participate in sessions that address educational theory, personnel selection, and legislation.

Using a five-point scale in the survey, council members rated performance, giving themselves 4.0; district offices, 3.4; and the Central Service Center, 2.8.

In the organization of their councils, the members established bylaws, used rules of order, and created a process to replace council vacancies. The councils also sought information and assistance from a wide variety of providers.

Council members -- with the exception of teachers -- noted improvements in the areas of student performance, instructional programs, school climate, facilities, and staff. In general, the teachers did not perceive improvements in these areas.

In April 1992, the Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning will again ask council members to respond to a survey on these same issues, thereby allowing council members the opportunity to share experiences with each other.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1989, the Chicago Public Schools, in an effort to increase student performance, enhance school management, and improve delivery of services, implemented systemwide school reform. The basic premise of reform was that by decentralizing essential operations necessary to local school governance and instruction and by involving parents and community in the management process, a more effective and efficient system would evolve. Inherent in the operation was the belief that a shared vision, cooperative decision-making, and equitable distribution of funds would bring about the realization of systemwide goals and objectives for excellence at each school.

Local councils were designated as the school team that would implement reform measures. Each school would have its own elected council composed of two teachers, six parents, two community representatives, one student (at the high school level), and the principal. The councils had responsibility for electing officers and for drawing up their own by-laws, rules, and operating procedures. In addition, all members would have input into the School Improvement Plan. This document, mandated by state law, is designed to improve the performance of students through more effective delivery of instruction and support services. Councils members were also authorized to retain or select new principals in their schools and to oversee the school budget.

Performing these tasks requires both knowledge of the school system and governance procedures on the part of persons elected to serve as council members. To provide councils with the necessary management skills and background information, an extensive training program was implemented. Training categories included budgeting, cooperative decision-making, governing by consensus, rules of order and meeting procedures, school-based management, state-mandated programs for various categories of students, and attendance procedures. These workshops were delivered according to local needs and interests.

After two years of operation, everyone concerned with school improvement is interested to learn how well Local School Councils (LSC) are working and to what extent they are able to lead school staff and the community to bring about reform. Of special interest is the issue of training: Are the nearly 6,000 council members receiving the training they require to perform their designated tasks with confidence and efficiency? Is adequate funding allocated to execute school improvement plans? To provide answers to these questions, the Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning conducted a survey of Local School Councils in the late spring of 1991. A total of 687 usable responses were received from council members at 266 schools. Respondents consisted of the following members of the Local School Councils:

**Survey Respondents**

| LSC Group | Number |
|---|---|
| Parents | 209 |
| Teachers | 163 |
| Principals | 125 |
| Community representatives | 110 |
| LSC Chairpersons | 80 |

The survey contained more than 90 items and examined activities of Local School Councils during their first year of operation. Survey items addressed the council's election, composition, organization, and operation. Council members were told that the information they provided would help research staff identify successful components that would be useful in the development of models. The responses of those who participated in the study gave particular focus to the following:

- Council-principal relations
- School improvement and expenditure plans
- Council activities
- Council training
- Community involvement
- Other tasks, as specified in *The School Code of Illinois*, Section 34-2.3.

The questionnaire consisted of both multiple choice items and open-ended segments. Participants took an estimated 45 minutes to complete their responses. Many councils submitted supplemental information about their methods of dealing with local issues and needs in their answers to open-ended questions. Both the items and participants' written responses are examined in this study. An additional report is being prepared on the successes of Local School Councils.

## PRINCIPAL EVALUATION

As the educational leader of the school, it is the principal's responsibility to create a school environment that encourages students, staff, parents, and community to develop their strengths and talents.

In each of the past two years, principal evaluation, selection, and appointment has been the overriding issue of many school councils. Some council members ran for election for the explicit purpose of retaining or dismissing the incumbent principal. Approximately 180 school councils have appointed new principals.

Council members in every school have critically examined their principal and have consciously chosen either to continue to entrust the person with the education of their children or have selected a new principal, someone who they believed was more attuned to the school community's needs and concerns. Schools have reached into the teaching ranks, into the central administration, into other schools, and even outside the school district to recruit new principals (a rare event in Chicago). Local School Councils that do not renew the contract of an incumbent principal are now required to provide written reasons for such action, when so requested. This procedure was unfamiliar to a good many members, who required special training in order to fulfill the responsibility. In October 1991, a new set of council members will be installed who must also be trained in the process of employing and discharging principals and, if necessary, providing reasons for their refusal to renew contracts.

Many councils used materials prepared in the office of Reform Implementation and the private sector which defined specific behavioral criteria. With these characteristics and reform goals in mind, Local School Council members assessed the principal's performance using criteria that measured the effectiveness with which administrative and supervisory duties were executed. In the first set of survey items, respondents were asked to comment on their participation in the principal evaluation process, the degree of that participation, and the criteria on which the evaluation was based.

Most agreed that they had played an important role in evaluating the principal's performance against a general set of criteria developed for the councils' use. Respondents indicated that they had either assisted in the development of or provided input into these criteria. Individual councils also noted that they had devised additional evaluation criteria specific to the needs of their respective schools.

Analysis of the responses to items addressing the nature and extent of participation in the principal evaluation process shows a high degree of agreement between community members and parents and between teachers and principals. A large percentage point spread appears between school staff and other council members. This apparent discrepancy may be due to the perceptions of the respondents regarding what constitutes a performance evaluation.

**Council Participation in Principal Evaluation Process**

| LSC Group | Percent Yes |
|---|---|
| Community | 78.6 |
| Parents | 84.7 |
| Teachers | 70.4 |
| Principals | 71.7 |

**Perceived Importance of Individual Participation in Principal Evaluation**

| Council Group | Percent Yes |
|---|---|
| Community | 81.7 |
| Parents | 82.5 |
| Teachers | 77.9 |

Respondents split on the issue of whether or not they had established criteria other than those supplied by Chicago public school guidelines for principal performance. Half of the council members indicated that they did establish additional principal performance criteria; the other half said that they did not.

The survey also asked the LSC members if they approved the school expenditure plan administered by the principal and who was an integral part of the expenditure planning process. Responses showed that most council members had both approved their school's final plan for expenditures and participated in the planning process.

**Council Approval of Expenditure Plan**

| Percent Yes | Percent No |
|---|---|
| 95.1 | 4.9 |

**Number of Times Identified by Respondents as Participating in Expenditure Planning Process**

| | |
|---|---|
| Principals | 618 |
| Council members | 566 |
| PPAC | 436 |
| School staff | 315 |
| Other* | 95 |

*Parents and community members other than LSC members and consultants.

## COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

The purpose of school councils is to form a framework in which members can function effectively to meet local school needs. This requires developing a structure in which all members are allowed full participation. Rules, procedures, and guidelines are an integral part of this structure, and provide members with definition of their roles and responsibilities as part of the governing team.

Among the council's many obligations is the requirement that they approve expenditure plans prepared and administered by the principals. These expenditures support programs specified in the Local School Improvement Plan. Discretionary funds, such as State Title 1, can be spent only with budgetary approval of the LSC.

Over 95 percent of those surveyed indicated that they had read and approved the State Title 1 expenditure plan. More than 87 percent considered themselves an integral part of the planning process at their schools. Of the respondents who did not consider themselves an integral part of the planning, 81.5 percent reported that they were aware of the process while 18.5 percent said that they were not.

The one activity planned most by schools is staff development. An overwhelming majority of school improvement plans include a staff development component, primarily in the areas of reading, math, science, and parent involvement. Virtually all staff development activities are designed, selected, and sponsored by the schools.

The emphasis on staff development reflects an understanding that the teacher is at the core of education. If students are to learn more, the teaching/learning process must be improved. Local School Councils are focusing on strengthening the knowledge and skills of the teachers they have.

Local School Councils were involved in assigning specific tasks to principals and making recommendations regarding school management. The survey asked the LSC members to identify the tasks they designated to their principals. Those most frequently reported were:

**Tasks Assigned to Principals by LSCs**

| Tasks | Percent |
|---|---|
| Open positions | 52 |
| Shift positions | 23 |
| Other | 20 |
| Close positions | 14 |

Other tasks listed were:

- Perform administrative leadership functions
- Make recommendations for inservice programs
- Organize interviews for new staff
- Create improved communication vehicles
- Write proposals
- Implement school improvement plans
- Provide periodic reports to the council
- Create contingency and backup plans
- Organize various programs
- Improve security.

To improve school organization, council members undertook a number of management activities, including assigning tasks to principal and staff, participating in school planning, and making recommendations to the principal on school matters. Some members also attempted to establish priorities between staff and program and between the school environment and community interests.

Council members also made a number of recommendations for change and improvement in their schools. Suggested changes ranged from selecting and purchasing new text books to altering disciplinary policies. These suggestions (listed below) fell into two categories: (1) those appearing most frequently on all surveys and (2) those addressing specific needs at individual schools.

**Recommendations for Change and Improvement In Schools**
(in percentage points)

| Areas | Percent |
|---|---|
| Textbooks | 53 |
| Staffing | 46 |
| Attendance procedures | 43 |
| Disciplinary policies | 57 |
| Other | 28 |

Although a wide range of recommendations was made in the "Other" category, there was general agreement among the council membership regarding the nature of those recommendations. In rank order these were:

- Establishing a dress code
- Adding more school personnel
- Improving student transportation
- Improving curriculum
- Building repair and maintenance
- Improving security
- Enhancing parent and community participation
- Improving budget procedures

- Initiating preschool programs
- Purchasing more materials, supplies, and equipment
- Initiating new programs, including after-school instruction and ethnic studies units
- Improving homework assignments

Local School Council members assigned tasks, participated in planning, and made recommendations to the principal. These initiatives in shaping local interests and needs constitute the essence of school-based management.

The next series of survey items dealt with the council meetings held throughout the year. Of interest were the number held, public input at the meetings, attendance, method of announcement, and availability of agenda. The survey also solicited information on the amount of time spent engaging in certain council activities: (1) attending meetings and (2) participating in some aspect of school management. When asked if they had held at least two public council meetings regarding progress and problems with the School Improvement Plan, more than 89 percent responded "Yes"; 10 percent indicated they had not.

Additional legislative requirements now state that an annual organization meeting must be held at the attendance center no later than November 1 of the school year. By that date, the time and place of regular meetings must be fixed.

Responses to other questions regarding meetings are charted below.

**Amount of Time Devoted to Public Input and Feedback**

| Number of Councils (in percentage points) | Amount of Time Allocated |
|---|---|
| 66.6 | 20-30 minutes |
| 33.3 | 31-60 minutes |

**Number of Council Meetings Held in 1990**

| Number of Meetings | Percent |
|---|---|
| 8-10 | 25.1 |
| 11-14 | 42.6 |
| 15-20 | 15.0 |
| 20+ | 17.3 |

The following two tables indicate the answers to the questions "How many meetings did you attend (last year)?" and "How many council members attend meetings regularly?"

**Median Self-Reported Attendance at Council Meetings**

| LSC Group | Average Number of Meetings Attended |
|---|---|
| Community | 12 |
| Parent | 11 |
| Teacher | 12 |
| Principal | 12 |
| Chairperson | 14 |

**Number of LSC Members Attending Meetings Regularly**
(in percentage points)

| Number | Percent |
|---|---|
| 11 | 13.3 |
| 10 | 22.5 |
| 9 | 23.3 |
| 8 | 17.8 |
| 7 | 10.7 |
| 6 or less | 12.4 |

**Method of Announcing Council Meetings**

- Notice posted on bulletin boards (office, hall, classroom)
- Hand-delivered letters by students and others
- Letters sent through U.S. mail
- LSC newsletter
- PTA newsletter
- Community newspaper
- School newspaper
- Signs posted in school and community
- Public service announcements on the radio
- Press releases
- Phone calls
- Notices in school bulletins and mailboxes
- Announcements at meetings
- Announcements over school PA system

Of all the survey respondents, only three parents replied that they were not always informed of scheduled meetings.

**Availability of Meeting Agenda**

| Number of LSC Members (in percentage points) | Agenda Availability (Yes or No) |
|---|---|
| 99.3 | Yes |

Those who replied that this information (meeting agenda) was not available to them included one community representative, two parents, and one principal.

Although they did not attend on a regular basis, a number of observers took part in council meetings throughout the year. The number varied depending on the kind of school and location. High school respondents indicated that 11 was the median figure for this item; elementary council members reported a median of seven observers for each of their meetings.

The number of meetings and attendance at these meetings varies according to the issues on the meeting agenda. When there is controversy, attendance is high and meetings might last far into the night. Most meetings are attended by active parents and community members who work with the school staff.

Information was sought on the number of hours per week council members devoted to their various responsibilities. The typical response by school type follows.

**HOURS PER WEEK DEVOTED TO REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETINGS**

| | Hours per Week |
|---|---|
| **High Schools** | 1-2 (44 percent) |
| | 3-4 (26 percent) |
| | 5+ (30 percent) |
| **Elementary Schools** | 1-2 (50 percent) |
| | 3-4 (28 percent) |
| | 5+ (22 percent) |

In addition to the amount of time spent attending regularly scheduled meetings, council members were involved with other meeting and training sessions up to two hours per week. At the elementary school level, parents are reportedly spending twice as much time in these meeting/training sessions as other group members. At the high school level, most groups are devoting about two hours per week to these kinds of activities.

All respondent groups indicated one to two hours of committee work each week plus one or two hours preparing for the meetings, except for high school principals who reported that they spent four or more hours per week preparing and participating in committee work. This suggests a minimum of six to eight hours per week committed to council activities by individual members.

A recent survey by the Beverly Area Planning Association suggests a time commitment by council members of five to 12 hours a week with additional time for special responsibilities and the demands of new initiatives.

Advisory committees provided Local School Councils with information and technical assistance in the various areas of school management and improvement. The survey asked members to identify these groups and to indicate whether or not they continued to function in an advisory capacity.

**Functioning Advisory Groups Identified by Council Members**
(in percentage points)

| Committees | High School | Elementary School |
|---|---|---|
| Bilingual | 53.2 | 61.3 |
| Chapter 1 | 69.3 | 70.6 |
| School Security | 70.5 | 54.3 |
| Vocational | 53.9 | 23.7 |

With regard to monitoring/implementing Local School Council policies, 80 percent of those participating in the survey said that they had received periodic reports from the school staff; 19 percent reported that they had not.

The response was similar for programs funded with discretionary moneys. In the survey group, 89 percent reported they were given oral or written reports about the programs; 10 percent said they received no information.

More than 600 council members responded to an item requesting a description of local school improvement planning performed at their schools. Nearly all (99 percent) explained the process they had used. Their responses indicated that planning was the cooperative effort of several committees composed of staff, parents, and community members. In most instances, both local school staff and community provide input. Refinements were generally made by the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC) and the LSC. Specific procedural examples are cited below.

**Types of Local School Planning**

- Joint venture among participating groups, usually in this order: (1) suggestions given by LSC, Canal Core Team, Board of Education and LSC Needs Assessments, PPAC and staff; (2) suggestions presented to staff by Improvement Committee; (3) budget examined by LSC for feasibility of implementation.
- Principal-formulated basic plan which council discussed, amended, and voted on article by article.
- Action plan formed by LSC members, working on committees: ideas were presented at public meeting; committees drafted plans and sent to PPAC; PPAC drafted final plan and sent to LSC for approval.
- General brainstorming session with all concerned personnel participating; prioritizing session with Local School Councils and Core Planning Teams refining and writing action plans.
- School-wide needs assessment by Council with assistance of outside agency.
- School Improvement Plan (SIP) divided into sections with subcommittees of staff, LSC members, parents and community members preparing each part.
- Joint venture of PPAC and LSC committees.
- Questionnaires submitted to staff and parents; suggestions analyzed in workshop format; final document prepared by committee from refined suggestions.

- Suggestions from BOE guidelines and outside consultant.
- Adaptation of plan from previous year with some changes derived from Needs Assessment.
- Core planning team and design team created with assistance of LSC.
- Proposals submitted by LSC and PPAC chairpersons to LSC for approval.
- Plan prepared and presented to LSC by principals and PPAC teachers.
- Survey of all aspects of instruction, management, school plant, materials, and supplies; plan derived from findings in every area by committee of LSC.
- Plan developed by teachers; modified and implemented by LSC.
- Planning meetings of all concerned personnel and LSC.
- Needs assessment conducted among staff, parents, community; results discussed in workshop with PPAC, faculty representatives, principal, LSC; planning meetings held following workshops and assignments for writing document made; final plan written by designated group.

## TRAINING AREAS

Reform legislation requires that Local Schools Councils must receive training and assistance. Further, current legislation specifies that council members shall, to the greatest extent possible, complete training within ninety days of election in the following areas:

- School budgets
- Educational theory (pertinent to the attendance center's particular needs, including the development of the School Improvement Plan and the principal's performance contact)
- Personnel selection.

The success of school reform rests, in part, on promoting rational approaches to decision-making at each school site. An informed Local School Council, once trained, begins to diagnose problems and promote feasible solutions at the school site. How reform policies improve low academic performance, reduce dropout rates, and have a school-level impact can be determined.

Training has been provided by a wide variety of organizations. Approximately two-thirds of the council members have received training in reform legislation, school budgets, principal performance contracting, and planning school improvement; one-half were trained in educational theory, personnel selection, and the Open Meetings and the Freedom of Information Acts. Survey responses indicate that principals have received more training than other groups in almost all categories. High school councils received more training in reform legislation, the only category in which all high school groups agreed that they needed additional training. Their highest request was for training in educational theory and planning school improvement. Unlike the high school councils, elementary school councils expressed a need for additional training in all categories. The following table shows how the council members responded to whether or not they had training in specific areas or needed more.

## Training Responses

(In percentage points)

| Council Group | Reform Legislation | | | School Budgets | | | Educational Theory | | | Principal Performance Contracting | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Elementary School** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** |
| Community | 55.8 | 20.9 | 12.8 | 62.5 | 14.8 | 10.2 | 44.6 | 30.1 | 13.3 | 61.9 | 21.4 | 7.1 |
| Parents | 56.7 | 19.9 | 13.4 | 66.1 | 12.7 | 10.2 | 44.3 | 30.6 | 13.7 | 61.1 | 24.5 | 7.9 |
| Teachers | 63.5 | 17.5 | 7.9 | 70.2 | 12.2 | 4.6 | 57.7 | 26.0 | 8.9 | 61.0 | 20.8 | 2.4 |
| Principals | 84.5 | 7.8 | 6.8 | 80.4 | 1.9 | 9.3 | 88.1 | 5.9 | 4.0 | 74.7 | 19.2 | 3.0 |

| Council Group | Reform Legislation | | | School Budgets | | | Educational Theory | | | Principal Performance Contracting | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **High School** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** |
| Community | 78.9 | 21.1 | 0.0 | 63.2 | 21.1 | 5.3 | 52.6 | 36.8 | 5.3 | 73.7 | 15.8 | 5.3 |
| Parents | 63.2 | 21.1 | 7.9 | 70.0 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 48.7 | 30.8 | 15.4 | 69.2 | 23.1 | 5.1 |
| Teachers | 76.2 | 14.3 | 0.0 | 76.2 | 4.8 | 0.0 | 60.0 | 20.0 | 10.0 | 81.0 | 9.5 | 0.0 |
| Principals | 93.3 | 6.7 | 0.0 | 80.0 | 0.0 | 6.7 | 57.1 | 35.7 | 0.0 | 78.6 | 14.3 | 0.0 |

| Council Group | Personnel Selection | | | Planning School Improvement | | | Open Meetings Act | | | Freedom of Information Act | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Elementary School** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** |
| Community | 42.4 | 38.8 | 7.1 | 64.0 | 16.3 | 9.3 | 57.1 | 28.6 | 7.8 | 50.7 | 36.0 | 8.0 |
| Parents | 39.7 | 40.2 | 13.1 | 66.2 | 15.0 | 9.9 | 62.1 | 24.1 | 8.0 | 54.8 | 29.0 | 9.7 |
| Teachers | 45.4 | 41.2 | 8.0 | 71.3 | 15.5 | 5.4 | 54.5 | 32.2 | 7.4 | 52.5 | 35.6 | 7.6 |
| Principals | 83.5 | 14.6 | 1.0 | 90.7 | 2.8 | 5.6 | 76.4 | 15.1 | 6.6 | 72.4 | 16.2 | 8.6 |

| Council Group | Personnel Selection | | | Planning School Improvement | | | Open Meetings Act | | | Freedom of Information Act | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **High School** | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** | **Yes** | **No** | **Need More** |
| Community | 38.9 | 44.4 | 5.6 | 78.9 | 15.8 | 5.3 | 68.4 | 21.1 | 0.0 | 61.1 | 27.8 | 0.0 |
| Parents | 53.8 | 28.2 | 10.3 | 66.7 | 12.8 | 15.4 | 60.0 | 30.0 | 2.5 | 57.1 | 28.6 | 11.4 |
| Teachers | 57.9 | 26.3 | 0.0 | 85.7 | 4.8 | 0.0 | 81.0 | 9.5 | 4.8 | 76.2 | 14.3 | 4.8 |
| Principals | 80.0 | 20.0 | 0.0 | 93.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 86.7 | 13.3 | 0.0 | 85.7 | 14.3 | 0.0 |

In addition to the eight training categories previously cited, councils received training in areas specific to LSC roles and responsibilities, group dynamics, State Chapter 1, parent involvement, and curricular improvements. The major providers of this training, in rank order, were public interest groups, Board of Education staff, university professors, and Chicago Teachers' Union personnel. The number of additional sessions attended by council members varied according to perceived need as the following table reveals.

**Additional Training Sessions Attended by Council Members**

| Number of Sessions | Percent Attended |
|---|---|
| 6 or more | 3 |
| 5 | 12 |
| 4 | 10 |
| 3 | 15 |
| 2 | 17 |
| 1 | 43 |

While the recommended and optional training sessions added to the confidence and efficiency of LSC groups, many felt that their effectiveness would increase with additional training in specific areas. Again, the number of areas varied depending on the needs of the group.

| Number of Areas Requiring Additional Training | Percent Requesting |
|---|---|
| 5 or more | 7 |
| 4 | 6 |
| 3 | 15 |
| 2 | 18 |
| 1 | 54 |

When asked to list areas where councils needed more training, there was general agreement among respondent groups. All acknowledged the eight key areas: reform legislation, school budgets, educational theory, principal performance contracting, personnel selection, planning school improvement, Open Meetings Act, and Freedom of Information Act. In addition, many council members requested training in the following categories:

**Identified Areas Requiring Additional Training**

- Parent/community development
- Rules of order
- Council responsibilities
- Computer training
- Conducting effective meetings
- Conflict management

In a final series of questions on training, respondents were asked to compare the quality and quantity of training opportunities in the current year with those previously offered. Items dealt specifically with the number of sessions and the benefit derived from attendance at those workshops. Their responses are tabled below in percentage points.

**Rating of Quantity and Quality of Training Sessions**
(in percentage points)

| Principals/Teachers | | | Parents/Community | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Quantity** | **Quality** | | **Quantity** | **Quality** |
| 70 | 68 | **Better** | 69 | 54 |
| 26 | 31 | **No change** | 27 | 39 |
| 5 | 2 | **Worse** | 4 | 6 |

The ratings across respondent groups did not vary significantly. The perceived quality of training sessions was lower than that of training opportunities.

Local School Council members have participated in a wide variety of training activities, most of which have been assessed as "adequate" or"better." Yet many members have not been trained in mandated areas of the legislation regarding reform, open meetings, and freedom of information. There is a continuing need for effective training by validated trainers providing specific services in the mandated training areas.

## PERFORMANCE RATINGS

Asked if their councils excelled in any particular areas, e.g., election process, school improvement planning, principal's performance contract, conflict resolution, 75.2 percent replied "yes"; 24.3 percent said "no." More than 400 described their specific strengths which covered the following unifying experiences:

- Contributing to achievement of the Illinois Bell Ameritech Award
- Developing the School Improvement Plan
- Negotiating the principal's performance contract
- Working together to relieve school overcrowding
- Working as a team to achieve school goals and objectives
- Bringing additional resources to the school
- Implementing school dress codes
- Arriving at consensus in planning and discussion (developmental decision-making)
- Providing input into the rehabilitation process

Survey respondents were also asked to rate the overall performance of (1) their respective councils, (2) the district offices, and (3) the central service center on a five-point scale (1=poor, 5=exceptional). Results were calculated in terms of overall ratings and specific assessments by groups represented on the LSC. Both sets of information are included.

**Summary of Overall Performance Ratings**

| | |
|---|---|
| • Respective councils | 4.00 |
| • District offices | 3.39 |
| • Central Service Center | 2.80 |

**Local School Council Assessments of Performance**
(by respondent group)

| Elementary School Rating | Council Group | High School Rating |
|---|---|---|
| | **School Council Ratings** (on a five-point scale) | |
| 3.94 | Community | 3.79 |
| 4.01 | Parents | 4.19 |
| 3.82 | Teachers | 4.24 |
| 4.13 | Principals | 4.53 |
| | **District Office Ratings** (on a five-point scale) | |
| 3.35 | Community | 2.55 |
| 2.82 | Parents | 2.62 |
| 3.18 | Teachers | 2.58 |
| 3.84 | Principals | 3.36 |
| | **Central Service Center Ratings** (on a five-point scale) | |
| 3.07 | Community | 2.56 |
| 2.95 | Parents | 2.50 |
| 2.63 | Teachers | 2.60 |
| 2.74 | Principals | 2.47 |

Both the overall summary and group assessments show a much higher rating for the Local School Council performance than for that of the district offices and the Central Service Center. Perhaps members are more familiar with their own operation and better able to determine its effectiveness. On the other hand, their ratings may indicate a basic dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of services rendered the local schools by the district offices and the Central Service Center.

## COUNCIL PROCEDURES

Councils were surveyed about their procedures for membership selection, development of bylaws, and conduct of meetings. While there was general agreement between high schools and elementary schools, responses of high school members tended to be four to seven percent higher.

- Established bylaws — 95 percent **yes**
- Use rules of order at council meetings — 93 percent **yes**
- Use rules of order at committee meetings — 71 percent **yes**
- Use regular process to replace LSC members — 80 percent **yes**

A review of responses regarding replacement of council members indicated that vacancies were filled by a vote of the full council. The process was either one of appointing the person with the next highest number of votes (in the category of parent, community, or teacher) or posting a vacancy and interviewing candidates (publicly or in private). In a few instances a person who had been active in council activities was chosen.

Ninety-one percent of the survey audience noted that they had received and reviewed the *Systemwide Educational Reform Goals and Objectives Plan*. Within this group, 427 council members reported they had sought information from others about reform legislation. The major sources are entered in the following table.

**Sources of Local School Council Information**
(in percentage points)

| | |
|---|---|
| Public Interest Groups | 16 |
| Lawyers | 14 |
| Central Service Center | 14 |
| Reform Office | 11 |
| District Service Center | 7 |
| Public Officials | 5 |
| Law Department | 3 |
| CANAL | 3 |
| Parent Education Center | 1 |
| Chicago Teachers' Union | 1 |

In a separate study conducted by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, similar results were found among Local School Councils in 16 surveyed schools. Their major concerns were budget, legislation, curriculum/instruction, school improvement planning, and principal selection.

Councils indicated that they encouraged members of the school community to help them carry out their responsibilities (89.3 percent returned "yes" answers; 10.2 percent said they had not yet elicited help from the school community). There was little variation across respondent groups, yet 16.3 percent of the community said "no," while only 8.9 percent of the parents answered negatively to the item on seeking support.

## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENTS

Many would argue that school improvement is vital to the enhancement of student achievement. Certain instructional, environmental, and administrative conditions must exist in order to achieve excellence in education. Local School Councils have begun instituting programs and policies that they believe will make their schools more effective.

Results of the survey show that all council members recognize positive change and improvement in staff and student performance and in school management since the implementation of school reform. The areas of change and degree of improvement are summarized below.

### Student Performance

The following chart shows the comparison between staff perceptions of student improvement in academic achievement, social skills, and attendance over the previous year and those of other members of the Local School Councils. The Local School Improvement Plans indicate most schools are using incentive programs coupled with outreach efforts to parents to improve student attendance.

**Perceptions of Improved Student Performance Over Previous Year**

| Council Group | Area of Improvement (in percentage points) |
|---|---|
| | **Academic Performance** |
| Community, parents, principals | 64 |
| Teachers | 46 |
| | **Social Progress** |
| Community, parents | 63 |
| Principals | 59 |
| Teachers | 48 |
| | **Attendance** |
| Parents | 59 |
| Community | 52 |
| Teachers, principals | 44 |

When asked if **needs** of all students were being met, slightly more than two-thirds (68 percent) of council respondents agreed that student needs were being met "better" than in the previous year. Included in this group were four out of five principals (80 percent).

The percent of **students expected to graduate from high school** was rated "better" by 60 percent of community respondents and 55 percent of parents. A majority of teachers and principals in the survey thought there was no change in this category over the previous year. Teacher respondents tended to judge the degree of improvement in student performance at a lower rate than other LSC members.

## Educational Programs

Nearly three out of four LSC respondents thought their **instructional programs** were "better" than those of the last school year. More principals were of this opinion than other groups (83 percent). Only 69 percent of teachers rated instructional programs better. Two percent of the LSC members surveyed thought the instructional program was worse than in the previous year. Across all council groups, one-half of those surveyed said that the **special education** had improved since the last school year. The other half did not perceive a change in the program. A majority rated their **gifted** program as having "no change" and their **bilingual program** as "better." Overall, two out of three respondents were satisfied with the degree of improvement in their Chapter I programs.

## School Climate

Survey findings show that a majority of parents, community, and principals on the LSCs believe that **school discipline** improved over the past year, along with **safety** and **social programs.** Among teachers respondents, 20 percent thought that discipline was "worse" than in the past year, and 12 percent rated safety "worse."

Perceptions of improvement in the area of **gang and drug problems** were mixed. A majority of teachers and principals reported "no change." More than half of the parents (52 percent) thought that the drug problem was less severe.

Community members, parents, and principals reported that **student enthusiasm** was "better" than the past year. Among teachers, only 38 percent responded that student enthusiasm had improved; 53 percent said there was "no change."

## Facilities

Of all items in the survey, **building conditions** elicited the most negative response. With respect to interior conditions, most principals viewed the **condition of classrooms** as "unchanged." Parents and community members had a greater awareness of external facilities. Forty-five percent reported that the **condition of school grounds** was "better"; 40 percent noticed "no change"; and 15 percent perceived that they were "worse." A majority of teacher and principal respondents were of the opinion that there was "no change"; some 37 percent thought they were "better."

## Staff

**Staff attendance** was perceived by 62 percent of community respondents and 50 percent of parents as "improved." Only 42 percent of teachers and 38 percent of principals thought staff attendance improved. A majority of all LSC groups except teachers rated **staff dedication** as "better" than the past year. Among teacher respondents, 45 percent rated the item "better"; 11 percent said that it was "worse." **Staff expectations for student learning** elicited a similar response. More than half of the parents, community, and principals perceived an improvement over previous years; fewer than half of the teachers thought this was the case.

## Parents

A majority of community, parent, and principal members of responding LSCs ranked **parent expectations for student performance** as "improved." A majority of teachers did not perceive any change in parent expectations over the previous year.

## CONCLUSION

John Dewey wrote, "All reforms which rest simply upon the enactment of law, or the threatening of certain penalties, or upon changes in mechanical or outward arrangements are transitory and futile." Chicago school reform is based on more than law. This survey reveals positive involvement by a vast majority of respondents representing thousands of Chicago parents, community residents, teachers, and administrators.

The Local School Councils have not only created changes that improve the delivery of services and quality of education in our schools, they have also involved many others in the process. Their efforts have shown that reform must come from the dedication, belief, and efforts of large segments of the population: council, staff, parents, community, local action groups, and the students themselves. Only through shared vision will meaningful and lasting change occur. This is best expressed in the words of the council members.

- "Every member of the council is a child advocate."
- "We have become a second family and work together to accomplish our goals."
- "(We) approved a plan that was untried and turned it into a most successful program."
- "We have a diversified LSC which reflects the diversification of our student body. The harmony is a joy to behold."
- "The biggest success at our school is. . .the positive [attitude]. . . growing. . .and we are getting away from negative [attitudes]. TEAM is what we are now reaching. All teachers now believe we are there to help, not attack [them]. With this in mind, they are now more open to ideas and changes. Parents and community people are starting to believe in us. Many positive [changes] will come in the fall. And all ideas are geared to the bottom line--the student.

All councils have made significant decisions. The most important of these involve:

- Approving the school's annual budget
- Making recommendations on textbook selection
- Advising the principal on discipline and attendance policies
- Evaluating the allocation of staff and making recommendations on appointments
- Approving a three-year School Improvement Plan
- Selecting or retaining a principal for a four-year contract.

Through this survey, council members have shared successes in their programs and activities. They have also articulated their continuing needs. What emerges is a portrait of exceptional results from exceptionally committed and hard-working people. To reiterate General Superintendent Ted D. Kimbrough's assessment of council activities, "Local School Councils are demonstrating a reasoned and responsible approach to school reform."

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